THE IMPACT OF CULTURE ON TRANSLATION

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ABSTRACT

One of the most important approaches to translation is the socio-semiotic or cultural approach which means that translation is not restricted to the meanings of sounds, words, grammar and rhetoric but it goes beyond mere correspondences to cultural presuppositions and value systems which create a different world picture specific to every culture (Nida, 1985:121). This paper aims at pointing different problematic areas in translation that result from differences in culture to which the two languages belong.

1. The Concept of Culture:

The anthropologist Malinowiski (1962:169) defines culture as "the fullest context of all human activities. It is the vast instrumentality through which man achieves his ends both as an animal that must eat, rest, and produce; and the spiritual being who desire to extend his mental horizons, produce works of art and develop systems of faith"

Haviland (1975:12) defines culture as "a set of rules and standards which when acted upon by the members of a society produce behaviour that falls within a range of variance that readers consider proper or acceptable"(for further details, see Muhammad 1986).

The fabric of society operates and becomes visible through our use of language. This fabric includes the social context of language use which naturally presupposes the existence of a particular society. Society has implicit and explicit values, norms and laws, and with all its particular conditions of life: economic, social, political and cultural (cf Davis 1977: 21- 57).

Culture is defined as the way of life and its manifestations, which are unique to a society that uses a particular language as a means of expression (Newmark, 1988:94).

Culture may be defined as a set of beliefs, which governs the behaviour patterns of a society. These beliefs include religion, economy, politics, literature and language. Thus, language is an integral part of culture, and translation involves two cultures, the culture of the source language(source culture) and the culture of the target language(target culture)(Aziz and Muftah, 2000:85).

2. Types of Cultural Problems of Translation:

Aziz and Muftah (2000:90**)** say that cross-cultural translation may constitute many problematic areas. This is true of translation between English, which represents part of the western culture, and Arabic, which belongs to the oriental culture.

2.1 Geographical Culture:

Two cultures involved in translation may have divergent backgrounds related to such topics like animals, plants and climate. The Arabic speaking person may be said to inhabit States generally characterized by a hot and dry climate like Iraq, Syria, North Africa etc, whereas the culture of Western Europe is cold and wet. Within these two cultural frameworks, the different geographical terms will acquire different shades of meaning for the people using them.

2.2 Religious Culture:

Religion has deep roots in many different cultures and is revealed in how people speak and behave. However, some communities are more religion conscious than others. In general, the impact of religion is stronger and more obvious in the East than it is the West.

2.3 Social Culture:

Social ideologies raise a number of problems. These include the attitudes of various societies toward love, marriage and the concept of decency.

2.4 Material Love

The term material love has a broad sense and includes such things as food, means of transport and other objects that people use in their daily life. These may be different from one community to another. Developed Countries would deal with various material things like E-mail and WWW, which may not be found in Developing Countries.

2.5 Linguistic Culture:

How people view the external world and what distinctions they draw between its various parts are likely reflected in their language: some linguists draw a distinction among three basic language functions. These functions are ideational, interpersonal and textual. They are realized differently in different languages. At the ideational function, for example, English recognizes two terms as far as the number system is concerned: the singular which means(one) and the plural which means(more than one) whereas Arabic distinguishes three terms: singular which means(one), dual which means(two) and plural which means(more than two).

3. Definition of Translation:

Translation plays an important role in human communication, and the importance of it has grown dramatically in the 20th century the amount of information and ideas exchanged among different languages has increased. Yet, the emergence of translation as a profession comparatively recent that is still surrounded with controversy much of which emotionally inspired (Ciroen, 1966:12).

The fact that translation has been a subject of constant controversy and that many scholars have different views about it, has resulted in presenting several definitions concerning the process of translation.

Nida and Taber(1974:12) mention that translation is concerned with reproducing in the TL the closet natural equivalent of the SL, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style, but in contrast to others, translation is approached as a search for equivalent not sameness of meaning.

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Aziz (1989:19) mentions that translation is an operation that is performed on two or more languages in which the source text is replaced by the target language on the basis of equivalent between both texts(lexis and grammar of the target language; and the source language phonology or graphology is also subsequently replaced by target language phonology or graphology).

Suleiman (1999:145) states that "translation, is an art and skill, is an integrated process which involves the comprehension, analysis, reformulation of text by incorporating the contextual, semantic and socio-cultural aspects of source language and target language text".

Cook (2003: 52) says that the interpretation of language in context relies on the degree to which the participants share conventions and procedures including those related to paralanguage, pragmatics, and genre. Such conventions and procedures, together with values and beliefs which lie behind them, are elements of cultural knowledge, and the people who share them, can be thought of as belonging to the same culture.

Al-sulaimaan(2010: 83) mentions that the term culture can be defined as a collection of traits connected with a community of individuals which is common to the individuals in the society and not given by natural biological or physical necessity.

4. Types of Translation:

Translation has been viewed differently by different scholars. There is no unanimous agreement about its definition, models and types. However, some scholars attempt to define it and specify its types and models. With regard to its types and models, Catford (1965) classifies the types of translation according to rank, extent and level. Nida and Taber, (1974) mention two types of translation, namely formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. The up-date methods of translation are those suggested by Newmark (1982). In what follows we will talk about each one of them very briefly.

4.1 Semantic Translation:

Newmark (1982: 7) mentions that in semantic translation, the concentration is on the message rather than on its effect or force. The basic aim of the translator is to convey the SL formal and contextual meaning of the original texts as accurately as the semantic and syntactic structures of the original SL text. This type of translation is characterised by being more complex, more concentrated, inclusive of more details and focus on the content rather than the intention of the author of the original text, or the resultant effect.

4.2 Communicative Translation:

In communicative translation, Newmark (1982: 7) confirms that the focus is on reproducing the same effect on the TL receiver as that of the original text on the SL receiver (i.e., it emphasizes the force of the message more than the content of the message). In this method of translation, the translator gives himself the right to add or remove certain lexical items in order to make the thought of the SL text clear to the reader. Communicative translation is characterized by being subjective, smoother, clearer, simpler and more direct than the semantic

one. For this reason, Newmark prefers this method to the semantic one.

5. Translation and Culture:

It is a commonplace fact that cultural presuppositions and value system create, by virtue of cultural specificity, a mental set characteristic of each culture and it is expected that various mental sets overlap between one language and another, but they rarely match exactly. These mental sets as reflected by language look like some invisible borderlines drawn across the world image, which does not largely differ among and between languages.

For instance, in the western world, dragons are regarded as symbols of dire danger and as such they fit in the Book of Revelation which harbours several terrible creatures besides the dragons while the dragon is normally regarded as a symbol of good luck in the Orient.

Several events recorded in a text may likewise have quite different meanings because of different cultural values. For instance, among the Muslims the story of Ibrahim and Ishmael is regarded as one of the most significant proofs of the grace of God while less significance is attached to this story in the western world. Also kings of Israel are considered prophets in the Gloriuos Qur'a:n and Solomon in particular is almost mythified while in the Old Testament they are all represented as historical figures. This impression of the Muslims, therefore, differs from that of the western man of those figures since each culture is influenced by a different prototype. A sociosemiotic approach to translation has led to some problems of meaning and ambiguities since the cognitive structure or rather the mapping of the cognitive structure as reflected in words does not match among cultures. Among these problems are the distinction between the designative and the associative

meanings (which paralleled to some extent, the distinction between denotation and connotation) and the metaphoric representation (Nida, 1985:21-3).

The above mentioned aspect becomes clear in the representation of colours in different cultures. The word (black) for instance, is a term of abuse or insult in several white cultures while the designative meaning of the same word in a white culture does not contain or suggest any pejorative shock. The term of insult is another example, "you cow" does not mean anything pejorative in an Indian culture nor does "a mouse" in China mean any passive connotation. On the other hand, designatively both "cows" and "mice" can be used neutrally in all cultures(Dulf, 1984:11-2).

Related to this problem is that of cultural relativity of peacocks, pandas, camels kangaroos, and penguins are representatives of India China, Arabia, Australia and Eskimos equally as representatives of their respective species. Snow regions as contrasted to desert regions have created different metaphors relating snow in the former and heart in the latter to boon and pleasant things. Different parts of the body are given different weights of significance in different cultures thus affecting not only the aesthetic standards but the metaphors attached to these standards.

Also, it is often broadly admitted that since language is an embodiment of an underlying human common experience which the thesis of linguistic universals implies the translator's job is to actualize this presupposition whatever the peculiarities of the language he is dealing with.

A narrow consideration of the concerned languages, however, shows that the above assumption is not quite adequate because it aims at universalization of usage while ignoring at the same time cultural variations.

Ecology, it is my impression, does not homogenize but it rather determines linguistic variance across cultures. First let's assume that an Arab native speaker receives good news and that he must formulate his psychological enjoyment into a sentence. He will literary say:

"This news freezes my chest"

A statement which, to say the least, will seem particularly bizarre to his English interlocutor. The reason for this unusual wording of the experience of the Arab can only be explained with reference to the ecological conditions of the Arabian Desert which structure and explain his repertoire of metaphoric images.

Needless to say, that the translator handles such a culturally- bound expression with the idea of giving it back into English. He certainly does not need to be weather specialist to find the appropriate corresponding expression. The Arab item is cold oriented whereas the English item is hot- oriented, each of them responding respectively to his environment conditions. Moreover, this item shows a difference in terms of the symbolic representation of affectivity which is represented by the physical organ "chest" for the Arab and by "the heart" for the English.

Culture- bound expressions explicitly spot light the cultural relativity and prove that the Linguistic Universal Theory does not comprehensively hold in time and place.

Let's take some local examples, Satan the crow, the Magi and the Jew. Different cultures harbour different systems of beliefs what is held sacred for an Indian can only be viewed with horror or disrespect for an Arab. Satan is worshipped by the Yezidiz while damned by Muslims. In reviewing the folklore of the Middle East nations two phenomena stand out. The first is the hostility between the Arabs and Persians; the second is hatred between Jews and Muslims. The first discord is

national and racial while the second one is principally religious and historio-political.

For many Muslims, the term "Jew" is a term of insult. It is a synonym of niggardly, miser, mean and lousy, while the term "magus" stands for passive association. Whether derived from the Arabian Nights or some other sources, this sterio-typical example betrays cultured bias and as such cultural relativism. A cow to a North African is an animal of boon on good omen while an owl is a bird of bad omen to most nations. It is not the bird by any characteristic ominous but rather human bias which associates this bird to deserted and directed places. Being a night bird….the associative meaning thus single out certain entities as being positives or passively. When these entities, say animals, and colours, are used in a text like Chinese, Indian, Russian, Arab or English they definitely cannot show their positivism or passivism. "Black" certainly is a benign colour for African Negroes thus affecting not only language but the aesthetic sense (cf Nida, 1985:123).

6. Conclusion:

All in all, these cultural aspects have their great relevance to translation and it seems that cultural equivalence when lacking can very likely block the process of translation. One method to solve this problem is to provide an explanation and place it in the footnote for making clear this aspect to the readers. Another method is to expand cultural awareness of both translators and readers through an over-expanding cognitive mapping and wider- world view so as to understand such differences in the TL in their SL meaning potential and connotation without affecting any change in the TL text equivalence. However, it seems that along time must pass until this aim becomes within reach and since this cannot be achieved on, by resorting to footnote.

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